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**PHD THESIS BOOKLET**

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**Descriptions of a state and statistics at the turn of the 18–19th-century Hungarian  
intellectual history  
(*Politica* and disciplinarization in the enlightened sciences)**

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## **I. Aims of the present work**

The thesis investigates the enlightened scientific culture in which German statistics and state sciences emerged and operated as a part of the political modernity. This scientific culture in its early stage was deeply indebted to the sixteenth and eighteenth-century transition of early modern state. In the historiography, the early modern state was associated with the concentration of power, the expansion of sovereignty and the appearance of absolute political administration. The absolute theories on governance and the practising monarchical absolutism had major role in reshaping European political map. In particular, they contributed to reach a new compromise between the king and estates, but also led to alter the balance of secular arm and clergy. Under the influence of these changes, a new type of learned courtier appeared, who as a *homo novus* (doctor, educator), started to play more and more important part in political decision-making. Although the presence of the man of letters in politics set the scene for the professionalization of the state of art, the rise of modern political knowledge culminated firstly only in theoretical-practical genres such as 'reason of state' and 'mirror for princes'.

Initially, the reason of state discourse (*ragion(e) di Stato*) was issued as a part of advisory literature and political education, which targeted the prince and indicated a new political praxis (*Staatskunst*) that dedicated itself to the reconciliation of the principles of common good and morally good governance. Conceptually, from the late renaissance until the mid eighteenth century, the operation and the identification of state interest were comprehended in the terms of *arcanum (imperii)*, which asserted that the secret (reason or mystery) of state can not merely reveal for learned men who sees it in books and philosophy, but for the very few (chosen ones) who have real political experience and are engaged in the state council. The withdrawal of 'arcanist' political literature was enhanced by refurbishing eighteenth-century administrative state, which, inducing the new form of centralised political administration, supported the rethinking of the old state of art as a more scientific piece of knowledge. At this point, the intellectual historical inquires frequently set the focus on biographical, political aspects and limit the chance of gaining broader picture about the enlightened political sciences. In order to bring the question of political and scientific knowledge to the table, the interrelation of politics and knowledge should be approached from a different angle. However, the antithesis of politics and scientific knowledge in general has been taken granted in historiography, the treatise opts for newer tendencies that set the focus on textual and contextual interplays. Also, it points out that the question of eighteenth-century political, scientific modernity can be answered, as Arnold Tarnai put it, by „using evident

scientific sources”. In doing so, the treatise asks after the foundations of eighteenth-century Hungarian political and scientific thought, while it raises the question about the ways and intellectual stakes of reception process, in which German state sciences influenced Hungarian political and scientific modernity. In the eyes of contemporaries, the anticipation of adapting statistics proved to be an ambiguous process that triggered approval as well as rejection.

The central question of the research traces back to a seminar series started in 2008 in intellectual history. In this seminar, the scrutinize of the oeuvre of the eighteenth-century doctor and statistician, Sámuel Decsy (1742–1816) set forth such problems of the late Hungarian modernity as, how statistical literature became appreciated in Hungarian political thought after the death of Joseph II. Or, which modifications, presumptions were needed to the reconfiguration of political thinking, and to what extent could statistics contribute to this idiom. Reflecting to the results of this investigation, the thesis proposes that the reception of statistics in Hungary was due to a twofold process. On the one hand, it was against the polyglot arguments that protected the political construction of the old corporative state, on the other hand, in its secular form still mirrored the division between catholic and protestant scientific culture. In addition, the statistics as part of the political and scientific modernity was closely related to the phenomenon called 'ideology of science' that combining scientific patriotism and vernacularism delineated the late enlightenment's popular project of progression. This widely-spread understanding of progression, though its fragments had already existed in the era of early enlightenment, merited its prominent place in the 1790s and was functioning as a cultural filter for political and scientific ideas.

The treatise identifies statistical discourse as a political and scientific tradition that accelerated modernization of the state in the second half of the eighteenth-century Habsburg Empire. Firstly, it aims at rethinking and placing statistical discourse on the horizon of contemporary intellectual debates, then it traces the interplays between (scientific)ideological patterns and the disciplinarization process of statistical field. The different implications of the research will be discussed in four chapters. The first chapter's aim is to share an overview about methodology, references, sources and the initial questions that motivated the project. In the second chapter, the framework of rational theology will be explored as a part of early modern scientific culture, in which the idea of progression still worked as a concomitant of divine teleology. This section of the chapter claims that by the mid eighteenth century metaphysical argumentation tended to bend empirical critics, which issued human and social progression as a partly profane, partly sacrificed question of moral theology. The third chapter strives to depict the conceptual transitions that enabled perfectionist theories to be successfully

applied to the natural scientific context of German state sciences. The last chapter will come to the question of how statistics and state sciences could be materialized in the eighteenth-century Hungary. Also, explaining a numbers of printed textbooks, this chapter takes into account of the local and contextual conditions that illuminated intrinsic dynamics of statistical discourse in the second half of the eighteenth century. At last, the treatise providing a short glance at the turn of eighteenth and nineteenth century, gives a short outline for further investigations. In particular, by analyzing the conceptual transfusions and differentiation of Hungarian *honismeret* and German *Landeskunde*, it comes to the conclusion that the subgenres of statistics performed a major role in pursuing political and scientific modernity to the Reform age.

## **II. Applied methods**

The treatise, instead of focusing on one method, follows a composite and problem-centered approach. This approach has been deeply impressed by the achievements of the 1990s intellectual history, literature history, history of philosophy and history of science. Beyond these composite approach, the applied methodology is largely based on the framework of conceptual history and intellectual history. Among these methodologies, it will be of high importance the particular questions of political languages (John Pocock), the intentionality (Quentin Skinner), the correlation of semantic analysis and the use of language (Reinhart Koselleck), the perspective of the history of political discourse. The application of these problems to the late Hungarian modernity and statistical discourses seem to be beneficial in two ways. Firstly, it reveals the complexity of discourses that has been largely ignored in the Hungarian historiography so far. Secondly, avoiding the mono-causal explanations, it calls for the need of multicontextual analysis. This sort of analysis can be benefited from cases, when multi-contextualist scope is able to shed new light on widely-accepted statements of historiography.

One of these benefits comes to the question in the third chapter, when the division between 'the statistics as an independent field of knowledge' and 'the statistics as a part of the state sciences' draws out crucial implications in particular with the development of the discipline. The first case would represent the way when early description of state in an eighteenth-century sense became statistics (*Staatenkunde*), and found its place among other disciplines of state sciences. The second one refers to a particular approach which was elaborated by the mid-century sciences of Göttingen, especially, by the textbooks of Gottfried Achenwall (1719–1772). The treatise does so by comparing two conceptualizations

and will reveal that lineal development and the autonomy of statistics could hardly have been Achenwall's intention, because he originally implied to providing a new empirical ground to state sciences, rather than to create a new research field. This sort of epiricism was due to the apparent decline of protestant scholasticism, and led to the conceptual renewal in sciences via adapting natural scientific verification.

In addition to these set of questions, the analysis will pay close attention to the disciplinarization process, conceptual framework and discursive configuration of enlightened sciences. Moreover, the thorough investigation of scientific keywords and dynamic terminologies can provide the opportunity of taking a glance at multi-dimensional fields of politics and science. In the previous studies, this linguistic richness was frequently simplified to the political contexts and favour such interpretations by which disciplinarization process could be mingled with the problem of Foucauldian governmentality (*gouvernementalité*). The problem of simple explanation was discussed in the German historiography of the history of political thought. Especially, it was explicated in Axel Rüdiger's monography as an example for cameralist learning in Halle. In the author's statement, the question of simplicity occurred in the heuristic-retrospective / internal-external inquiries of political scientists' and intellectual historians', when state, in the given conditions, is taken as if its development could be describeable from one direction. Rüdiger purported that individual agencies can be easily misunderstood by theoretical and empirical inquires, in particular, when they change objective premises with subjective assumptions. Regarding the emergence of state science, Rüdiger suggested a possible solution that statistics and early state disciplines should be considered as 'structuring structures' (*strukturierende Struktur*), by which the separation of theoretical reduction and social field will be more salient. The integration of the more and more independent political science (*kameralistische Polizeiwissenschaft*) into academic structure during the eighteenth century depended not only on administrative-bureaucratic policy, but also became reflected in scientific criticisms. Nevertheless, according to Rüdiger, the emancipation of political and scientific fields were proceeded as a controversial and tense process that arranged to lay the basis of an autonomous political discourse, while it subsumed moral, religious and scientific components to the state affairs. By this logic, the emergence of statistics can be described as a transition from *Fürstenstaat–Territorialstaat* disputes into the eighteenth-century *Territorialstaat–Gesamtstaat* discourses. By the time of the enlightened absolutisms, these discourses became frequently reflected in the Eastern-European modernisation debates, and provided state interest to curricula. Firstly as a new (negotiated) type of political knowledge, then as a 'subjugated' academic discipline.

The objectivation of the knowledge of politics and state will be illustrated in conceptual interactions of politicization (*Politisierung*) and scientific expansion (*Verwissenschaftlichung*). Also, the treatise will account of the key categories, conceptual exchanges and interactions of the German philosophy and political thought (such as *Vollkommenheit*, *Zusammenstimmung*, *Politikwissenschaft*, *Staatsräson*, *Reichspublizistik*.) The treatise views the historical development of statistical field in the relation of semantic changes and shows special interest in the continuous and interrupted forms of conceptualizations. For example, instead of focusing on one aspect of early modern scientific culture, it considers analogical argumentation as a typical rhetorical (self)definition of scientific argumentation. Consequently, the treatise involves the (theoretical and practical) auxiliary disciplines of geography, history, moral philosophy, natural jurisprudence and metaphysics. The proper demonstration of the early history of statistics will be crucially important on behalf of the understanding the operation of Hungarian cultural transfers. In literature the West-East transfer orientation have been widely discussed. As the contributors of the volume *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe* have already pointed out, the Eastern-European context of reception had been substantially (re)formed by the unilineal channels of Western transmissions. The adaptation in these cultures had two typical traits. Firstly, it often supported expressive forms that stood very close to the original cultural patterns. Secondly, although, the new cultural productions had very low chance to be automatically accepted by internal discourses, their authors expended enormous sources to reserve good connection with the original institutions. As the number of cases have already showed, maintaining the connection with original context could not prevent intellectual isolation in a long run, but it led to low-level interactions. More rarely, it also reached that receptive endeavours be reflected in the mechanisms of Western culture. This cultural transmission by the end of eighteenth century resulted in edging the contrast between state-oriented, centralised, institutional discourses and cultural, intellectual, social-critical attitudes. The conflict was also striking between the different layers of statistical discourses, where the German import categories were used on both sides of conceptual oppositions.

The second chapter of the treatise investigates the theoretical, philosophical, scientific context of the modernization of state and sets the focus on the different theories of progression in the era of enlightenment. From a methodological point of view, the problem, has to be answered, lies here in the different scopes of the history of philosophy and the political, scientific discourses. Since, the intellectual historical descriptions tend to identify themselves with micro and meso contexts, the history of philosophy more often accounts the

highly praised conceptualizations of the early enlightenment (Altdorf, Leipzig, Halle, Berlin), like a *Gipfelwanderung* perspective suggests, as a biographical derivation of canonical works. The conflict of the two approaches have produced more studies in recent historiography. Basing on Quentin Skinner's classical methodological essay, Maria Rosa Antognazza's article drew more attention to the problems of contextualism and philosophical anachronism, while it also stipulated a plan for the reconciliation of two approaches. Besides the ideal balance of the two intellectual schools, the author also showed special interest in the interactions of early modern epistemology, metaphysics and historiography. From these research fields, the first two played indisputable role in establishing theoretical foundations of the enlightened narrative of progression. In particular, these two narratives had great effect on the contemporary rational and religious inquiries, which, as a subtle and narrow interest of academic philosophy, by its eminent complexity proved to be unable to earn recognition in wide publicity. As the scrutiny of big names of Leibniz, Thomasius, Wolff have assured, by the mid eighteenth-century the tradition of German metaphysicians (and their counterparts) had been questioned by those newer philosophers, who inclined to prefer a more democratic, popular demonstration to logical deduction. The transition was spectacular in the new and old disciplinary registers such as theology, philosophy, literature, aesthetics, while it led to the duplication of progression theories. Although the newer conceptualization varied from the old metaphysical ones in language, demonstration and use, there wasn't much alteration in the ethical foundation. This moral substratum provides the chance of taking a glance at the whole structure of scientific discourse without reducing the intrinsic hierarchy of progression theories to a few discourses (such as stadial theory etc.). In the second section of the chapter, this hierarchy will be discussed in contextualizing the genetic perceptions and implications of second-half-century theories of *Bildung* and pedagogy. Nevertheless, this period of time was still deeply influenced intellectually and politically by the traditions of rational theologies as well as the emergence of state field.

This complexity of problems and methodology will be presented, as John Pocock put it, in the form of history of political discourses with the exception that political questions, compared to scientific or philosophical ones, will not be recognized as a first aim of the inquiry. Also, the treatise sets the focus on the principal discourses and tendencies of eighteenth-century scientific culture, and provides a comprehensive, but not monographic understanding. As a result, it expects to give an overview (or draw a discourse-map) of the reception of Hungarian state sciences and statistics as a propaedeutics for further research. The

treatise in this sense also joins to the evolving trends in literature and emphasises the potential of the import categories of German political thought and state sciences.

### **III. Conclusion(s)**

The treatise presents the implications with eighteenth-century scientific and political culture in three chapters. After the prologue, the second chapter investigates the intellectual context of early enlightened sciences, in which progressive or perfectionist ideas emerged. Besides the logical arguments that having introduced in the prologue, this chapter' aim is to suggest that moral philosophical inquiry should be comprehended as an early source of late eighteenth-century political, social and scientific modernity. In doing so, the chapter reasons the probable relation of scientific knowledge and progressive narratives in early eighteenth-century metaphysical debates, then verifies the close relation of German moral theories and scientific progression. In this regard, this section comes to the conclusion that the conceptualizations of progression in its early stage had a great debt to the scientific patterns and the tradition of rational theology, before that it was widely shared in the era of the late enlightenment. The question of national progression became a prominent issue in the second-half-century discourses, in which the competition between European sovereigns was mostly handled as a measurable political indicator which defined the stage (or shelf) a nation prolonged to reach. This political context of progression theories presumed a moderate interpretation of political and social utility, which regarding the argumentation and theoretical implications still depended upon the scientific culture of early modernity, while it produced a wide range of debates about the real capacity and teleology of the way of human, social perfection.

The treatise takes the early modern concept of science as a composite and multi-layered phenomenon which effectively contributed to build a cohesive framework, where intellectual and productive activity (so be it religious, artistic or scientific) served as a preliminary to common good of the community. This idiom, concentrating on moral indications, turned profane in the second half of the eighteenth century. Also, it had a positive effect on the emergence of new disciplines and played an indisputable role in implementing the concepts of progression (*Vollkommenheit*, *Bildung*, *perfectibilité*) to the conditions of state sciences.

The third chapter depicts the process in which state sciences breaking with the Aristotelian conceptualization of politics, adapted natural scientific premises by the early eighteenth century, and comes to the trivial conclusion that the idiom of perfectionism not



only motivated statistics to become a politically useful discipline, but also placed restrictions on its development. The most important findings were due to the fact that newly established statistical studies, mostly in Gottfried Achenwall's textbooks, by the early 1750s had already showed palpable confrontation not only with scholasticism, but also with the morally-based political science of Christian Wolff (1679–1754). Achenwall's choice to establish statistics not on moral, than empirical (natural scientific) principles and facts made the descriptions narratively less colour, but also it affected the concept of practical science, which, introduced by the German state scientist as a profound framework, extricated real (natural) scientific reasoning from the obscure probability of metaphysics and moral anthropology. The new statistics aimed partly at developing state life through the intellectual and material contributions of citizens, while as a scientific knowledge it proposed plans for harmonizing principles and acts. In addition, statistics also produced a big amount of describeable and measurable data about the state and its conditions, which on the one hand proved to be very useful in practical decision-making, on the other hand showed great theoretical potential to heave state life onto a higher grade. After the delineation of the concept of statistics, the treatise comes to questioning the uniqueness of Göttingen narrative and draws the attention to the rival approaches in German context, represented by the contemporary geographical inquiries. The geography's expansion in the eighteenth century was the aftermath of the natural scientific turn, which, similarly to statistics, can not be described as a lineal process. Initially, the competition between statistics and geography was enhanced by the growing influence of state sciences, while its foundation laid in their mutual interest in describing the natural, physical and cultural formations that determined human societies. This competition in the revolutionary period culminated in the integration and different appraisals of such empirical research fields as history, politics and topography. Although, at this point, the historiography tends to ignore geography and favour Göttingen statistics, there is proof of that geographical scope still challenged 'statistical gaze' over turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

The competition between statistics and geography had unintended consequences on rethinking German state science tradition. In particular, geography by its global (cosmographical) and local (topographical) perspectives proved to be able to recycle and simplify the information and data, collected in volumes of *historia naturalis*, statistics etc. and establish a new form of geographical knowledge. Most importantly, geography could make the ambiguous and sophisticated conceptual framework, which elaborated by statisticians, reduced to the question of *Land und Leute* (country and people). The concept of state (*Staat*),

which meant to be the highest grade of civilization in German natural law tradition, according to geography was viewed only a mere particularity that is typical for the Western-developed-enlightened parts of the world. Although the analytical concept of state (*Staat*) was not used in the geographical problematization, in this competitive conditions it still worked as a flexible category that turned adaptable to state-centered and wider topographical scopes. Regarding the academic and civil forms of descriptive knowledge, the relation of statistics and geography seemed more problematic. Although the fusion of the two approaches was typically true for the Eastern-European cultures of the 1760-1770s, where statistical scope served as a supplementary discipline in civil topographical and geographical volumes. In academic world, the two approaches were already separated from each other and turned to institutionalize.

The last chapter investigates the different layers of reception in Hungarian political culture, and it will issue such problems as the whig narrative of Göttingen, the parallel development of statistics and geography, the fractured vision of state after the Turkish rule in Hungary, the relation of 'estate dualism' and ancient constitution as an idiom in contemporary political thinking, the multiple interpretations of national characterology and the presence of natural scientific semiotic as a specific part of political discourses. The chapter also premises that the major role of such textual traditions as topographies and geographies in the history of the reception of state sciences can be interpreted in the frame of cultural synchrony and otherness. Firstly, the chapter puts the interest in the period of first half-century that was largely determined by the political conditions formed by post-war politics of Habsburg court. This period also revealed the fundamental need for (re)negotiating the symbolic, physical and political borders of the country. The termination of Turkish wars by the 1720s had a consolidating effect on the transformation of central-governmental policy. The main line of this policy under the rule of Maria Theresa aimed at the modernisation of political administration and education all over the Habsburg Empire. The new arrangements also paved the way for the institutionalization of statistical studies, which, in contrast to the example of Göttingen, having been subordinated to bureaucratic training, performed in an absolutely different academic climate.

The chapters considers the reception process of state sciences not as a static, but as a moving phenomenon, which was fractured and ruled by different living conceptions of state. The first one, basing on the idea of corporative state, appeared from the 1750s in geographical in topographical literature, and fixing the physical, geographical, political border of the country inclined to resolve the opposition between the conceptualizations of medieval *regnum*

and German *Gesamtstaat*. The most evident particularity of statistical scope laid in the acceptance of reason of state discourses. The last section of the chapter investigates the institutional arrangements of educational reform that evolved from the 1760s. Finally, it comes to the conclusion that the adaptation of reason of state and independent statistics served as a necessary intellectual premises of that guarantees which ensured the separation of state affairs from civil and other political issues. This way, state sciences could successfully contribute to make the problem of utility, as a central question of enlightened sciences, understandable on individual and collective-social scales, too.

#### **IV. List of Publications**

##### **Papers directly connected to thesis**

Tibor Bodnár-Király: A „Decsy-biográfia” helyzete és kutathatósága. [On the research of the biography of Samuel Decsy] In: Politikatudományi tanulmányok. Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Állam- és Jogtudományi Kar Doktori Iskoláinak III. Konferenciája, 2012. április 20. Ed. Antal Attila. Budapest, ELTE Állam- és Jogtudományi Kar, 2012. 37–49.

Tibor Bodnár-Király: Koronaszme és történelem. Vita a szent koronáról a 18. század végi Magyarországon. [Holy Crown and history: the polemics on the Holy Crown at the end of 18th century Hungary] In: Politikai elit és politikai kultúra a 18. század végi Magyarországon. Eds. István Szijártó M. – Zoltán Gábor Szűcs. Budapest, Eötvös Kiadó, 2012. 170–191. [Talentum sorozat]

Tibor Bodnár-Király: Szent Korona és nemzeti karakter a 18. század végének magyar eszmetörténetében. [Holy Crown and the National Character in the Late Eighteenth Century Hungarian Intellectual History] In: „Politica philosophiai okoskodás” Politikai nyelvek és történeti kontextusok a középkortól a 20. századig. Eds. Gergely Tamás Fazakas – György Miru – Ferenc Velkey. Debrecen, Debreceni Egyetem, 2013. 209–219.

Tibor Bodnár-Király: Decsy Sámuel és a Pannóniai Fénisz. A „nemzeti karakter” fogalma a 18. század végi nyelv- és nemzetépítés diskurzusban. [Samuel Decsy and the Pannóniai Fénisz: The notion of 'national character' in the discourses on the development of language and nation at the end of the 18th century in Hungary] *Aetas* 30(2015), 2. sz., 17–43.

Tibor Bodnár-Király: Decsy Sámuel (1742–1816): orvos, tudós, lapszerkesztő (Vázlat). [Samuel Decsy (1742–1816): doctor, erudite, journalist (Draft)] *Kaleidoscope*, 6(2015), 10. sz., 25–36.

Tibor Bodnár-Király: *Conjectura* és emberi fejlődés Csernátoni Vajda Sámuel 1795-ös fordításában. [*Conjectura* and human progression in Samuel Csernatoni Vajda's translation of 1795] *Kaleidoscope*, 7(2016), 13. sz., 137–152. [Élet–Tudomány–Történet: Eszmék–Tudás–Tudomány]

Tibor Bodnár-Király: Ember és Természet viszonya Aranka György természetfilozófiai írásaiban. [Man and Nature in György Aranka's Natural Philosophy] In: Az ember – kultúrtörténeti és poétikai megközelítésben. Fiatalok Konferenciája 2016. Eds. Eszter Déri, Ágnes Dóbék, Dániel Görög, Anita Markó, Szilvia Maróthy. Budapest, reciti, 2017. 165–189.

Tibor Bodnár-Király: Kompiláció és rendszerezés Decsy Sámuel Pannóniai Féniksz című művében. [Compilation and systematization in Samuel Decsy's Pannóniai Féniksz] *ItK*, 121(2017), 4. sz., 473–488.

Tibor Bodnár-Király: Államleírás és a „statisztika elmélete” a 18–19. század fordulóján. [Descriptions of a state and 'the theory of statistics' at the turn of 18th and 19th century] *Századok*, 151(2017), 5. sz., 971–986.

Tibor Bodnár-Király: „a' Törvényeknek véllek együtt Rabjai, vagy ismét véllek együtt Urai vagyunk, és maradunk törvényesen” Összehasonlítás és tudomány a 18. század végi magyarországi politikai diskurzusban. [„Shall we be either slaves or masters of the laws again, and remain lawfully” Comparison and Science in the Late Eighteenth-Century Hungarian Political Discourse] In: Aranka György és a tudomány megújuló alakzatai. Eds. Annamária Biró, Emese Egyed. Kolozsvár, EME, 2018. 109–131.